



## Arts and Entertainment

### Essence of Ella

'The First Lady of Song' is homage to legendary vocalist

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Tina Fabrique learned to scat naturally.

"I sang with the Duke Ellington Orchestra," Fabrique said. "I worked with his son for four years and he would say 'I want you to scat in this session.' You have to be comfortable to do it."



PHOTO/ED KREIGER

*Tina Fabrique plays Ella Fitzgerald and Thaddeus Wilson plays Louis Armstrong in the national production of "Ella."*

Scatting is a must, at least when you're portraying the life of jazz vocalist Ella Fitzgerald, dubbed "The First Lady of Song."

"(Fitzgerald's) scatting is something that very few people could match," Fabrique said. "It's just very interesting the treatment that she gave to it. A lot of young people who watch the show find a direct correlation between scat and rap."

Scatting is a vocal improvisation, allowing singers to create their own melodies.

For the past five years Fabrique has been acting and singing the role of Fitzgerald in the national tour of "The First Lady of Song." The show is in Charlotte Feb. 11-13 at Knight Theater at the Levine Center for the Arts.

At age 4, Fabrique was listening to the music of Mahalia Jackson and Fitzgerald, not knowing that one day she'd be performing as Fitzgerald.

"If you're going to play her, then singing is a given," she said. "But I wanted to capture the spirit of her and what motivated her as a woman. I believe she was a very courageous woman because she had a difficult childhood."

The performance is in two acts. The first, Fabrique says, takes place in 1966 and recalls Fitzgerald's beginnings, starting with the loss of a relative and what transpires.

"She's lost a very close family member and that has made her go back into her memory," Fabrique said. "She talks to us like we're her closest friend and explains how she felt in her life."

Musicians play a prominent role in Fitzgerald life, like Chick Webb (drummer), Ray Brown (a bass player and husband) and Louis Armstrong.

"The band doubles as cast members," Fabrique said. "The audience gets to see how she emerged from humble beginnings."

The second act is a Fitzgerald concert with standards like "A Tisket, A Tasket," "How High the Moon," "That Old Black Magic," and "They Can't Take that Away from Me."

Fabrique has been singing for 35 years, and like many black singers got her start in church. She began working in nightclubs in New York City, performed on Broadway and sang a variety of genres. Her favorite is jazz, and second is R&B.

"Jazz is the freest and you're free to express yourself," Fabrique said. "You can do so many things musically in jazz that you may be limited to in other areas."

Fitzgerald, who died in 1996 at age 79, appeared at the Apollo Theater in Harlem and won numerous Grammys.

"This is an opportunity to really see an experienced voice that you wouldn't get to," Fabrique said about Ella. "It's a very personal tribute to her."

Tickets begin at \$39.50.

For more information, call (704) 372-1000.

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